

Interagency Drought Workgroup (IDW)
Meeting Minutes

August 20, 2020, 2:01 PM Teleconference
Audio recording available at:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Water/Drought/2020/IDW_2020-08-20_recording.mp3

CT Agency representatives:

DEEP: William Foreman, Helene Hochholzer, Doug Hoskins
DEMHS: Brenda Bergeron, Doug Glowacki, Bob Kenny
DoAg: none
DPH: Steven Harkey, Lori Mathieu
OPM: Martin Heft, Eric Lindquist
PURA: Linda King Corbin, Gail Lucchina, Maria Szul

Federal Agency representatives:

USGS: none
NWS: Nicole Belk, Nancy Furbush, Britt Westergard

Other participants:

none

1. Call to order

Martin Heft called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM.

2. Approval of minutes: 7/23/2020

A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft 8/13/2020 minutes and the motion was approved unanimously.

3. Update on municipal water coordinators

Bob Kenny said 80 municipal contacts have been identified, but that number does not include anyone from Region 4, where they are making rapid progress and he expects many more names to be provided in the coming days.

4. Discussion of agencies' coordination, management, and notification responsibilities at next stage of drought

Martin Heft noted that an [update issued after the previous meeting](#) said conditions were worsening and that the group might decide at this meeting to advance to Stage 2. That update included an overview of how outreach would occur if that action is taken. He said those steps are described on pg 22 of the [state drought plan](#). He provided a quick recap of the steps described in that update.

Eric Lindquist said the group should identify each agency's responsibilities so they are clear if a decision is made to advance to Stage 2. Martin Heft said the timing of the notices is important – the Governor's Office or its designated agency has to act first.

5. Discussion of changes in conditions since previous meetings and weather outlook

Martin Heft described the information received in advance of this meeting and asked Doug Glowacki to provide an overview of what he provided. Doug said the outlook is for the state to receive only $\frac{3}{4}$ " of precipitation in the next two weeks, less than the normal 2". He explained that the expected rain would be from afternoon storms and rain would not be uniform across the state. He noted that the remnants of tropical storms could approach and that additional tropical waves are entering the Atlantic, but we otherwise should expect below-normal precipitation in the next two weeks.

Nicole Belk shared her screen to provide an overview of the information she had provided for this meeting. She noted that northern CT had the least precipitation in the past week; southern CT had more. Northern CT remains well below normal and southern CT was normal for the week. Fairfield County and northern Litchfield County are in good shape, but others are low.

Nicole pointed out that the recent cool weather dropped the month's average temperature from being 4° – 6° above being 2° – 4° above normal. She noted that temperatures will likely be warmer again in the next two weeks. Nicole also mentioned that she had estimated the precipitation necessary to avoid triggering the 3-month precipitation trigger as of the end of the month. Litchfield, Tolland, and Windham counties would need 1", Hartford County would require more than 3", and she highlighted that the CT River Valley has been especially dry. Fairfield County has already received enough precipitation to avoid reaching that trigger, New Haven County needs $\frac{1}{2}$ " to avoid it, Middlesex County needs 2", and New London County needs $1\frac{1}{2}$ ". These are not good, given the small amount of rain in the 2-week outlook.

Steve Harkey provided an update regarding public water supply reservoirs. Overall, reservoirs are at 78.9% of capacity, which is 93% of normal. Eight systems are at 80-89% of capacity, two are at 70-79% of capacity, and Southington is at 63% of capacity. Three additional drought declarations were declared since last week. Bristol and Manchester are at the first stage, and UConn, which is a ground water system, has issued a request for voluntary conservation. Maria Szul noted that Aquarion's Greenwich system is at 66% of capacity and is the only system regulated by PURA that is at its 2nd stage of drought. She said Aquarion does not anticipate reaching Stage 3, but drought will persist into late fall.

Eric Lindquist described data Steve Anderson had provided and noted that short-term measures that had declined sharply prior to last week's meeting have stabilized but are solidly in Stage 2 or even Stage 3. He added that DEEP had indicated that forest fire danger had moderated. He also highlighted significant degradation shown in the new [US Drought Monitor](#).

6. Review of State Drought Plan and recommended course of action (see attached draft table)

Eric Lindquist displayed a table of Stage 2 and 3 drought triggers and county-by-county data. Eric highlighted changes since last week and noted that many drought plan criteria focus on monthly statistics. He said last week's table might have under-represented the precipitation deficits in some counties and he also highlighted that many short-term indicators have deteriorated further. Fire Danger improved, but it's the flashiest indicator and can change daily. The US Drought Monitor has also deteriorated. Helene Hochholzer provided an update on the forest fire danger information she had provided on Tuesday. It will likely be escalated in tomorrow's report and, if not by then, it will happen by the weekend.

Eric Lindquist said the eastern counties were in flash drought a week ago, but precipitation since then has alleviated the short-term impacts, although long term impacts remain. There was a discussion of the layout and information of the drought trigger table and Eric noted the need for judgement for interpreting criteria, in part due to geographic variations within each county.

Martin Heft said the next step is to consider whether the current drought classification should be advanced to Stage 2, either statewide or for individual counties. Doug Glowacki pointed out that the pattern of recent precipitation in the state has been for the south to get more than the north. He highlighted that precipitation this time of year is dominated by isolated storms and, as an area grows drier, such storms are unable to deliver as much precipitation and the drying process is self-sustaining.

Lori Mathieu said the agencies should discuss the situation further before it makes a decision. She noted that, overall, reservoirs are fine, but DPH is worried about some systems. She agrees that it is appropriate to look more carefully at the northern counties and to not wait for things to get worse. Doug Hoskins said Stage 2 is appropriate for the northern counties and noted that Stage 2 is named *Incipient Drought*, which is a reasonable description of conditions.

Martin Heft added that the northern counties have triggered the major criteria and asked if there is any interest in including additional counties, perhaps all other than Fairfield. Brenda Bergeron said she is concerned about having so little precipitation in the two-week outlook. She also pointed out that designating the northern counties as being in Stage 2 would inform people from elsewhere of the risk if they are traveling there and help avoid fires, such as from people tossing a lit cigarette, which could create an emergency situation.

Maria Szul agreed with the northern county approach for Stage 2 but noted that Aquarion's lower Fairfield County system is the only PURA-regulated system that has notified PURA of being at one of its own drought stages. There was a brief discussion of DoAg's representative not being on the call and Martin Heft asked if there was agreement to elevate Litchfield, Hartford, Tolland, and Windham counties to Stage 2. A motion was made and seconded to do so.

Doug Hoskins recommended that the southern counties also be placed on notice and he noted the potential for confusion when messaging by the state and utilities is inconsistent. Lori Mathieu mentioned that the MDC has, in the past, issued contradictory announcements following state drought declaration. She suggested that state agency communications people reach out to utility communications people to coordinate messaging.

Martin Heft said agencies should not issue anything until the Governor's Office has acted. He outlined the process for press releases. He will build on the preliminary draft he had started and will circulate it to agencies for their input. There was a discussion of the timing that a draft should be available to agencies and for the release to be issued. Martin asked if there was any opposition to the motion and, hearing none, he said the motion had passed.

7. Items for next meeting and schedule

Martin Heft noted that the group is scheduled to meet again at 2:00 on 9/3/2020 and asked if anyone believes the group should schedule an earlier meeting. Lori Mathieu recommended the group go down the list of actions required at Stage 2 before adjourning this meeting and others agreed.

Eric Lindquist shared his screen to show Stage 2 actions. He noted that there are now 80 municipal water coordinators and asked if DEMHS will take the lead for communications with them. Brenda Bergeron recommended this group develop messaging and DEMHS will push it out. Eric asked if communications back to this group should also go through DEMHS and Brenda said this group should identify a contact for such communications and ask municipal water coordinators to also Cc: their regional coordinator at DEMHS.

There was further discussion of communications to and from municipal water coordinators and Eric Lindquist said he or Bruce Wittchen will likely be the contact for this group. There was further discussion of the path of communications and of the need for this group to be able to reach municipal water coordinators directly. Brenda Bergeron pointed out that COVID and storms are already burdening the regional offices, so we should avoid overwhelming them with more. There was a discussion of developing an impact reporter tool to avoid being overwhelmed by the potential volume of communications.

Eric Lindquist asked what this group wants to communicate or ask for and distinguish between outdoor and indoor water uses. Lori Mathieu recommended a general request for voluntary conservation, with outdoor watering being limited to two days per week in the Stage 2 area. But that might be too much to ask for; some utilities might say it is not needed. Each has its own response plan and a utility like the MDC will not hit its trigger for a while.

Martin asked if there are any provisions for transmitting water to other utilities and Lori Mathieu described the arrangement between the MDC and the New Britain Water Dept. The MDC has to sell New Britain up to 10 million gallons per day when needed and did so in 2016. She left the meeting at this point to join another.

Doug Glowacki recommended the press release also request a specific level of conservation, such as a 10% reduction, without being too specific. Eric Lindquist suggested as an alternative that the press release focus on reducing just outdoor water uses. There was general agreement with that approach.

There was further discussion of Stage 2 actions and Eric Lindquist pointed out that many are agency obligations based on statutory or other requirements. He added that there is some redundancy in the list. Eric also pointed out that that the list is intended as a guide. Every situation is different and the actions should be adapted to fit the situation. He highlighted the section on outreach and education and said those have not been done well historically. There was a discussion of how to include agency communications staff in this process.

Martin Heft mentioned the drought stage graphic created by DEEP and discussed at the previous meeting. Eric said he is working on that with DEEP's Ali Hibbard.

Brenda Bergeron said public messaging could be coordinated using the [Emergency Support Function 15](#) (ESF 15) External Affairs Task Force, which has already been actively working on COVID messaging. Eric Lindquist requested Brenda send a follow-up email outlining the approach and Brenda said she will do so. Eric Lindquist said the conservation guidance required at Stage 2 is already available online and a link will be included in the upcoming announcement.

Eric Lindquist provided an overview of actions in neighboring states. MA is in its Stage 2 of four stages. RI's group met but took no action and will meet again in September. NY has issued a Drought Watch in northern areas. Eric noted that the CT Dept. of Consumer Protection (DCP) can provide information about well driller activity that can help identify the scale of impacts on private wells.

There was a discussion of the potential use of the state's [WebEOC](#) system. Brenda Bergeron described the system and Steve Harkey noted that DPH has also considered the potential use of the system and provided further background regarding its potential use. Eric Lindquist said it is a great platform and is already in place.

There was further discussion of the remaining Stage 2 actions identified in the drought plan. Eric Lindquist asked DEEP to provide any specific messaging desired regarding forest fire risks. He also read the steps expected regarding water suppliers. Steve Harkey mentioned that DPH oversees licensed water haulers.

Eric Lindquist recommended that each agency designate one person to be on an action team that will complete the work needed for this declaration. Martin Heft asked each agency to do so by email by the end of the day. He is working on the announcement already. Steve Harkey asked that the request to designate someone be sent directly to each agency's lead, since some are not in the meeting now. Brenda Bergeron said she will designate Doug Glowacki.

Martin Heft said we will work on this today and tomorrow and asked if there is anything else to add at this time. He will get that request out to agency leads and then a draft of the announcement. He reminded everyone that this is all internal for now. There was a discussion of the upcoming meeting on 9/3. Nicole Belk mentioned that the MA group is scheduled to meet the same day, but the area NWS offices should be able to cover both.

8. **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 3:17 PM.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM